

Houghton Hall Park

February 2024 Newsletter

The Houghton Hall Park Renaissance and Renewal Project is being managed by Central Bedfordshire Council in partnership with Houghton Regis Town Council and is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund.



February is here and it is a very productive time in the park, plans are coming together for the year ahead for the gardens and our activity and event programme. The Friends of Houghton Hall Park are planning an Easter craft stall throughout March, this will be in the foyer of the Visitors Centre on a Thursday starting on 7th March which is also the day our activity programme restarts. The Stick Man Trail will be on from 10am to 1pm that day to celebrate world book day, this is an ideal activity for pre or home schoolers who love Stick Man.

In the wider park safety works are being carried out on the trees before nesting season officially begins, Neil our Park Ranger will tell you more about this in his article this month. The snowdrops are paying us their annual visit in the West Woodland, they are the first signs of spring and create a wonderful display, the flowers won't be here for long though so why not have a stroll this weekend, take a few photos and share them for this month's photography theme?

You may remember that last month a bra bank was placed in the foyer to collect bras for Against Breast Cancer, to date we have collected 168 bras! Thank you to everyone who has donated, keep them coming!

The park team are very excited to be involved in the first Houghton Regis in Bloom entry in partnership with Houghton Regis Town Council. The Anglia in Bloom region forms part of the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society's) Britain in Bloom competition. This campaign is set up to help us get the best out of the village, town or city where we live, both environmentally and florally. It is an excellent way of getting communities working together socially and having lots of fun on the way. To keep updated on this project give their social media pages a follow @houghtonregisinbloom



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Stick Man Trail for World Book Day

When: Thursday 7th March

Time: 10am to 1pm

Cost: Free!

Calling all Pre or home schoolers, celebrate World Book Day 2024 by taking part in the FREE Stick Man trail around the park!



Come down and visit our fun-filled activity trail featuring popular picture book character Stick Man, which will be open on Thursday 7th March. The self-guided trail is aimed at encouraging children to get outdoors and explore the natural world and find out how things grow. If you want to 'twig' how much fun the trails can be, then visit us 10am to 1pm.

There will be a limited amount of free Stick Man Badges and Certificates for you to collect once you have completed the trail, there will also be Stick Man Keyrings, books and soft toys for sale.

Spring Wreath and Arrangement Workshops

When: Friday 22nd and Saturday 23rd March

Time: 11am Friday, 10.30am & 2pm Saturday

Cost: £28 per person

It's that time of year again and spring is definitely around the corner, an early one this year as it falls in March.



Join us at the Visitors Centre where we will be giving you the opportunity to make spring wreaths or a table arrangement with a plethora of adornments to suit your personal taste. The demonstration will take you through how to make the base before letting you loose to forage and explore the exciting materials we will have on offer. Nests, eggs, rabbits, twigs, moss, raffia, ribbons, straw foliage, carrots, hessain, dried seed heads, paper roses and so much more....



Maybe this could be booked as a Mother's Day treat, a fun day out with a group of friends or maybe just for some 'you' time. No experience necessary and open to all abilities.

Book now at: <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/spring-door-wreath-workshop>

Dragon Egg Trail

When: Sunday 7th and Monday 8th April
Time: 10am to 3pm
Cost: £4 per person

Join us for an exciting dragon egg hunt this April, Olaf the ice dragon has lost his eggs in the park, can you find them before they hatch? Using your map find each egg, answer the questions and come back to the Visitors Centre to collect some treats!



Tickets cost £4 each, you can also take part in the trail for FREE but this will not include the prize.

Olaf the dragon will also be in the kitchen gardens on Sunday 7th April, do you dare meet him? Have a selfie, take part in dragon training and listen to a story, he will be in the gardens throughout the day between 10am and 3pm, this is a **FREE** activity.

Please bring a pen, something to lean on and a bag to take home your prize.

Refunds will only be given if we cancel the event.

Book now at:- <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/dragon-egg-trail>

Dragon Egg and Mobile Workshop

When: Monday 8th April
Time: 10am to 2.30pm
Cost: £3 per person

Come along to the Visitors Centre and make your own dragon egg, you will be provided with a polystyrene egg, coloured pens, and array of sequins and adornments to decorate it with. Make a fabulous dragon mobile to go with your egg.



Tickets must be purchased in advance but you can attend the workshop any time between 10am and 2.30pm on Monday 8th April*

*There is a limit to the number of children we can have in the room so there may be a wait, we will work on an one in one out policy, if there is a wait the children can have fun in our play area located directly outside the visitors centre.

Book now at:- <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/dragon-egg-mobile-workshop>

Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme.

February's theme is: 'Snowdrops at Houghton Hall Park', we can't wait to see what you capture for this one, please send your submissions to:-

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

The images must be taken between 1st – 29th February 2024 and each person can submit up to 5 entries. We will not accept any overly photoshopped images that do not represent the reality of the subject in the photo. Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter.

Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:

www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography

Thank you to Margaret Denty and Natalie McPhee for sending in their fabulous photos of the park's woodland for January's theme.

Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

February's Photography Theme

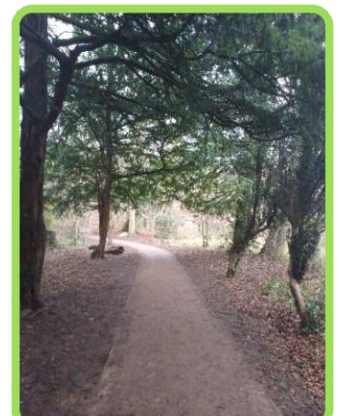
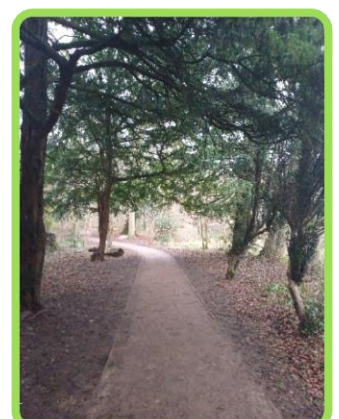
'Snowdrops' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in February our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 29th February
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

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Community Park Ranger Update



Greetings from the park. February is a time when the first signs of warmer weather are visible, and the colder days are behind us. Snowdrops, or *Galanthus nivalis* if you prefer roughly translated from Latin means "milk flower". Its name doesn't imply a drop of snow, the drop part of its name comes from eardrop, an old word for earring. Visitors to the park may have seen them in their thousands especially in the western woodlands of the park, I've noticed a lot of people taking pictures of them over the last couple of weeks.

Another early plant to pop up and let us know that warmer times are ahead is a member of the buttercup family the Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*) This plant has a yellow flower as you can see in the picture as does the Winter Jasmin (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) that I have seen outside of the park. In fact, although there are other colours emerging throughout the park most of the early wildflowers are either yellow or white because of what pollinates them this time of year, flies mostly, as their vision isn't great, and they lack colour vision white and yellow reflect plenty of

light which helps them locate the plants easier so they can get the valuable nectar from the flowers. The pale colours also soak up the weak winter sun more efficiently allowing them to develop better and remain fertile even in colder conditions

The recent windy weather didn't do too much damage to the trees in the park apart from a few smaller Ivy-covered trees that fell away from pathways fortunately. There will be some tree works going on this month and you can rest assured any tree work done is for the good of the tree, the park and the people who use it, no tree or branch will be cut back unless it's necessary.



Talking of trees, we have a good variety of 200 new trees to plant in the park, a mix of different height trees and plenty of food trees to attract more birds. A lot of these will be planted with the help of a dedicated group of volunteers who do various conservation tasks throughout the park all year round, we meet every other Sunday for a few hours. If anyone is interested in joining us on a Sunday please feel free to contact me and I'll get back to you to explain what we get up to and when our next session will be.

Take care and enjoy what the park has to offer,

Neil

Community Park Ranger

neil.forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



What's happening in the gardens?

We returned to the kitchen gardens on the 1st of February with a fantastic lunch and a chance to catch up after what seemed a long, dark January. The weather was kind, and it was great to see so many volunteers again and the garden buzzing with activity.

We have been working hard on preparing the kitchen gardens for spring so most of the beds are topped up with compost and new paths have been laid made up of woodchip. Thanks to local business Titan Tree Services who gave us a load of woodchip. Like all gardeners I feel much more in control of everything in the winter, the weeds aren't too bad, and the beds look pristine! Our volunteers have also been busy with tidying the site, cleaning the greenhouse, washing pots and generally bringing the yard to life. It's looking very ship shape and ready for a busy spring.

However, exciting times lie ahead and it's great to see the bulbs starting to come up and things starting to stir. The rhubarb is growing and I've even germinated some early peas in the polytunnel. We're having some success with a winter variety of lettuce, Winter Density. It was sown in early November and germinated in the warmer temperatures we had before Christmas. It's doubled in size since January, and I hope we will be harvesting leaves by the end of the month.


Fortunately, the heavy rain has not had too much impact on the raised beds but you can see how it is affecting the grounds outside the Kitchen Garden. We have a small sink hole which is being repaired as I speak.

Valentine's Day is a key moment because from that date the light levels start to change and we can look forward to longer days and shorter nights. In the polytunnel we can start to plant the beds with quick crops that will be ready in matter of months, such as spring onions, lettuce, radishes and spinach. There's room for them now but they will have to make way later in the year for the main event ... tomatoes. But all that excitement is to come!

We have been busy making growing plans for the spring and we are pleased to say we will be growing bedding this year. We will grow a variety of traditional bedding such as Geraniums, Pansies, Begonias, Petunias, Snapdragons, Lobelia, Gazanias, Fuchsias and others. These will be available to pre-order and then collect. More information and ordering details on the park website in April. Alongside our bedding we will be growing a range of vegetable plants and later in the year perennial plants. This project is organised by the Friends of Houghton Hall Park and the profits will go towards new projects for the park and kitchen gardens, as well as maintenance.

We've also been pruning our apple trees. I do love pruning them, it's a bit like tackling a crossword. You don't know where to start and have to loof for an easy way in. The wind has damaged some of the trees so firstly we removed all the broken and dead branches. Next the branches which are crossing over others. Finally, it's a question of how brutal you want to be! But the idea is to prune your tree into a bowl like shape with strong branches leading out from the centre and branching upwards. Hopefully it will be able to grow more strongly and the healthy branches can support a good crop of apples. We've given them a good mulch and fingers crossed for lots of blossom and fruit. It's very satisfying to stand back and look at your tree and know you're contributing to its health.

This is one of our apple trees before and after pruning. The straggly branches would struggle to support a good apple crop that would stay on the tree until harvest time. It's unlikely the roots are large enough to get enough nutrients to the large numbers of apples and the tree would start to catch diseases and drop apples in dry weather. Hopefully the tree will be able to concentrate on growing fewer apples which are more likely to stay on the tree until harvest time, it can also cope better with dry spells.





Finally, please do get in touch if you are interested in volunteering in the gardens. We are a friendly bunch and value everyone's contribution. It's not all about digging, nor do you need to be very fit. Lots of our volunteers enjoy helping in other ways, making crafts for sale, running the shop etc. We also organise outings and trips.

Keep warm and see you in the park.

Sue

Community Gardener

Sue.atherton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Café Chat

It seems like only yesterday when we moved into the cafe here at Houghton Hall! We now get our own page in the newsletter so here goes with our first attempt.

With the evenings getting lighter we are going to stay open until 4.30pm Monday - Friday and 5.00pm at the weekend, so you can enjoy both the park and the café longer. For those of you who are regulars, we now have our Houghton Hall / Really Awesome Coffee cups on offer at £7.99 – you get a free drink when you buy the cup and every time you use it you get a large for the price of a regular.

As we move into Springand it is coming, we are going to be refreshing our menu. So now is your chance to let us know what you would like us to put on the new menu. We can't promise to do everything you ask for, but we'll see if there's a theme that comes through. We will be setting up a suggestion box here at the café for you all to let us know what you would like to see. If you have an idea, don't be scared to write it down and pop it in the box. We will also be introducing a new range of cakes and sweet treats so feel free let us know what you want, and we'll do our best to accommodate.

As most of you already know, we offer a loyalty scheme where every hot drink you purchase, you gain a stamp on your loyalty card. Once you've reached 10 stamps, you get your 11th drink for free!

We like to keep things as local as possible here at the café. We ensure this by only using local suppliers for a wide range of our produce to reduce the travel miles. As an example, we source our succulent sausages from the butchers located around the corner from us in Houghton Regis, D&I Family Butchers.

Our current specials are a Breakfast Brioche Bagel which is our locally supplied butcher's sausages, bacon and cheese sandwiched in between a brioche bagel and toasted, you can add any other extras that come to mind that you fancy! To stay from last month which you all loved is the Chicken and Pesto Cheesy Melt you can pick between red or green pesto and a toastie or a ciabatta panini.

Until next month!

Mia

Café Manager

Houghton Hall Park Café



Keep in touch

Facebook

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Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Fri 9am to 4.30pm

Sat – Sun 8am to 5pm



Become a volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of giving something back to your local community? Then get in touch with us to see what you can do to get involved. Here are some ideas below:

- Observational Surveys
- Community engagement
- Weeding and clearing
- Cleaning
- Watering
- Growing food and encourage healthy eating
- Teach younger generations (if you have a skill or qualification, let us know!)
- Become a community leader
- Support other volunteers
- Contribute to the annual park events calendar
- Volunteering assistant at events running at the park
- Curate local history talks at visitor centre
- Habitat enhancement work in the woodland and meadow

There are many opportunities to take part. If you would like to volunteer and join the Volunteers of Houghton Hall Park, please email hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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